

perhaps, here by brawlite

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Summary:

Didn't you hear? Billy Hargrove went and bought himself that haunted house down on Cherry Lane.

perhaps, here

Author's Note:

sorry, all i do is write scary stories. i couldn't stop myself.

It's three AM.

Billy is *tired*.

He leans forward, pressing his cheek against the cool surface of the door, his hand hovering -- but not quite touching -- the antique knob.

"Please," he says. It's three AM and he is just so tired. "*Please* open."

He doesn't have the energy to spare for any emotion other than exhausted resignation. He can feel his chest caving, folding inward, his whole body yielding to the murmured plea. The fatigue.

A minute ago, the door hadn't budged for him at all.

When his fingers curl around the knob, Billy can feel the age of it, the aching years, underneath his finger tips. It's ornate embellishments have long since faded, metal tarnished around the edges and shiny in the center from decades of wear. He tightens his grip, teeth clenched in something like prayer, and gently twists his wrist.

The knob turns. The mechanism unlatches with a quiet click and the door pushes open easily, not even taking the time to creak.

Billy takes a breath, steps out of the bathroom, and leaves the door open behind him.

He wastes no time crawling back under the thick weight of his covers, surrounding himself with the warmth and the safety of his bed once again. It's just a mattress on the ground, lumpy and cheap, but it's *his* mattress on the ground, which makes all the difference.

Next time he wakes up thirsty, he's just going to go back to sleep.

“...Thank you,” he says to the darkness around him, feeling silly -- for finding safety underneath his covers like a kid, for getting stuck in the bathroom in the middle of the night, for talking to *nothing at all* -- and more than a little relieved.

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In the morning, the door is closed, again.

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“You look like shit,” Max tells him, over coffee at their favorite diner.

“That’s real kind of you, Maxine,” Billy says, taking a sip of his coffee. “You look like hell warmed over, yourself.”

But she doesn’t. She looks happy and well-rested and relaxed. Or as much of any of those things as a teenager chock-full of hormones can be. They both know Billy’s lying, which is why she doesn’t acknowledge his words with anything more than a quick twist of her lips into a frown. Three years ago, she would’ve walked away. Two, and she probably would’ve hit him with a baseball bat. Even last year, they weren’t this close -- which is to say they’re something like lukewarm acquaintances now, maybe. Which is more than Billy has going on with anyone else here in this rotten town, so.

“Seriously,” she says. “Are you sleeping at all? You look like a zombie.”

“Sure, I sleep.” Sometimes. In the driver’s seat of his car at the grocery store parking lot, or at the firehouse when he’s on a shift and nothing’s currently on fire.

“Well, you don’t look like it.”

“Bite me,” Billy says with all a toothy snarl, but only half means it.

The waitress brings them heaping plates crammed full of grease-laden food. It’s nothing like what Billy grew up with in California -- but after a few years in Hawkins, he’s gotten used to it. Besides, he kind of needs all the protein, if he wants to keep up his current muscle mass. He probably doesn’t need all the salt and the fat -- but beggars

can't be choosers and there's not much in Hawkins other than fields and empty calories.

"So," Billy says, around a mouthful eggs-bacon-and-pancake. "You and Lucas make up yet?"

Max's face twists into something offended. It's not clear for a second if she's more offended about Billy talking with his mouth full and giving her a good show of its contents, or about him prying into her personal life. It better not be the latter, because, honestly, he doesn't really *care*. He's just trying to make conversation. To be a better, more involved person, or to seem like one, anyway. Whatever.

They're not technically siblings anymore -- well, he's not sure, exactly, how it works with divorce -- but, again, it's not like Billy really has any *friends*. Besides, they're probably closer now than when they *were* siblings. Billy certainly hates Max less now. Even though he still kind of *does* hate her, but just because he hates everyone.

"Girls and boys can be *friends*, Billy. Not like you'd know, because you sleep with, like, every girl in sight -- but I'm just saying. *Normal* people can just be friends."

"So, you didn't make up." Billy is picking up what she's putting down.

Max groans, frustrated. "No, we *didn't make up*. Because I don't *want* to make up. I just want to be friends."

Billy raises his eyebrows.

"Wow, that's boring."

"It's not. It's, like, so much less complicated."

"You're in high school," Billy says. "Everything is complicated in high school."

What's a little extra complication if it means you have someone else to share it with? At least, that's what Billy always had thought: high school probably would've been much better if he'd had someone to lean on. It probably also would've helped if Billy was the kind of

person who *wanted* to have someone to lean on, but whatever.

Then again, Max has a whole huge group of friends for that kind of thing. They all seem pretty tight-knit, at least from what Billy can gather.

“So. When are you going to have me over?” Max asks, pushing around the last of her scrambled eggs on her plate with a piece of toast when they’re nearly done.

“When there’s more than one room in the house you can stand in without, like, getting tetanus,” Billy says.

“I can help you paint. Or pull down wallpaper. Or knock out rotten walls, or whatever you’re doing in there.”

Mostly, Billy’s just spent a lot of time locked in his bathroom, going slowly insane. He doesn’t say that, though. Instead, he says: “Free labor? I’ll consider it,” knowing he won’t.

He doesn’t need anyone else in his house. He definitely doesn’t need someone like Max, who is rational and realistic, in his house to confirm that Billy’s actually finally fucking lost it. He’s just *tired* and his house is a literal pile of actual shit, a relic from about two hundred years ago that should’ve been torn down years ago but wasn’t. And sure, if it had been torn down, Billy wouldn’t have gotten it for so cheap -- but sometimes it feels more like a burden than a blessing.

“Finish your fucking juice or you’ll be late to school.”

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It’s not that Billy has to drive Max to school, it’s just that he’s in the habit of it. For two miserable years, he drove Max to school, forced to comply with his father’s wishes just so that he could keep a roof over his own head. Then, Susan and Neil had gotten a divorce -- and still, Billy found himself pulling up in front of the old house almost every morning, ready to shuttle Max to school.

At least Susan got to keep the house in the divorce. It had been her own damn money on the down-payment, that’s for sure, but the

world is hardly ever that fair. Billy had thought she and Max would've been out on their asses in two seconds flat. Turns out, Neil had been the one with his ass on the concrete and his shit out on the curb.

It doesn't pay to be a wifebeater, evidently.

Last Billy heard, Neil had moved closer to the city, slumming it up in a shitty apartment in an even worse neighborhood. Billy would call his satisfaction with the whole situation sick, but he thinks he's earned a little delight in Neil's suffering after all these years.

Besides, no one would ever argue that Billy's a *good person*.

Anyway -- he drives Max to school in the mornings, unless he's coming straight off a shift from the firehouse. He doesn't pick her up after school because he's usually working or she's doing something with her friends, but it keeps them in touch, keeps them something close to friendly acquaintances. Which, honestly, Billy kind of needs more than Max needs a *strong male figure* in her life, like Susan keeps saying she does. The kid is probably better off without *any* male figures in her life, considering her track record. Billy isn't much of an upgrade from Neil, not by a long shot, but she doesn't seem to mind their time together and it keeps Billy at least kind of tethered to reality, so -- it's cool.

It's not that Billy doesn't know *anyone*. He goes drinking with his coworkers, occasionally helps someone work on a car or move old furniture around. Hell, he's rescued so many cats from trees that he's pretty sure he's met each and every cat that lives in Hawkins -- and subsequently, every lonely housewife, too. So -- Billy has people. He has days *full* of people.

He just doesn't really have anyone *more*.

He doesn't have someone like Tommy H. and Carol have each other, already on their way to popping out kid #2, which is absurd, really, Billy thinks, but Billy doesn't get a say in who reproduces in this town, so he just watches his old high school 'friends' from afar and occasionally catches Tommy in the local bar for a drink.

He doesn't have someone like Max has Lucas, even if they're on some ridiculous break.

Hell, he doesn't have anyone like Max has *all* of her stupid group of friends, all tight-knit and cultish as they are. They seem to have really got each other's backs, as dumb as that sounds. And maybe that'd be nice to have, every once in a while.

That would *probably* necessitate Billy not being so much of a dick all the time, and Billy isn't really into *that*, but he can dream, right?

Stranger things have happened.

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The wiring in his house absolutely sucks.

The place is old and things are constantly on the fritz.

Billy wakes up in the living room, on his mattress on the floor, with the lights on above him at least three times a week.

More frequently, though, the lights cut out while he's on his way to the bathroom at night. It happens so often that he just stops turning them on altogether, preferring to navigate the hallways in the dark, feeling exhausted and resigned.

He tries to pretend it doesn't feel so personal.

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"Please," Billy says, squinting into the dim light of his kitchen at five o'clock in the morning. "I'm very tired and I just want coffee."

It's fine that he's talking to himself, he thinks. Because that's all it is -- talking to *himself*. Not like he's talking to ghosts, or his house, or whatever, because that would be fucking stupid. It would also be crazy and Billy isn't crazy.

The sun isn't even really up yet. It's *way* too early for this.

He plugs the coffee maker back in *again*, presses the button to make it

go, and -- the circuit shorts out. The coffee pot dies. The radio dies. The lights die. Everything dies. Again. For the third time this morning.

Billy has been doing this stupid dance since four forty-five and he feels like dying. He probably needs to put in a new fuse into the breaker in the basement, but this old house needs a new *everything* and Billy isn't made of money. The coffee pot was working just fine last week, which means it should be working *just fine* today. Right?

"*Fine*," Billy hisses, slamming a fist against the kitchen counter. Everything rattles.

He feels his blood boiling, feels anger heating up in his gut, twisting and writhing like something fierce and trapped.

"No wonder this place was dirt fucking cheap," Billy growls, stomping his way back to the door to the basement, feeling a bit too much like his father in one of his rages. "It's because *everything's falling apart* in this piece of shit house!"

With that, Billy grabs the door to the basement and wrenches it open.

Or -- he tries to, anyway.

Instead, Billy ends up nearly yanking his shoulder out of its socket, the door not budging an inch. Stuck fast in the doorway, unyielding.

He tries again. The knob turns, unlatching with a pleasant little click that he can feel in his hand. But when he pulls, when he *tugs* with a violent yank, the door doesn't give.

"Oh my *god*," Billy says, words hissed through clenched teeth.

He throws his whole body against the door -- not that it would help it open, but out of sheer frustration. It doesn't do much other than hurt his shoulder and give him kind of a headache, but maybe that's just his whole fucking morning so far, all building up into one killer migraine. He throws himself at it again and again -- and then again once more for good measure, seeing red all throughout.

He knows it's unhealthy, and probably embarrassing, to let himself be

consumed by anger like this -- so much like his father -- but no one is here to see him, so he can't really bring himself to care.

It's just him and the house and Billy doesn't give a shit anymore.

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Billy nearly puts a hole in one of the walls of the kitchen with his fist that morning. He doesn't, in the end -- but it's a near thing.

He starts getting coffee at the diner on his way to picking Max up.

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Shifts at the firehouse are pretty damn boring.

Hawkins is pretty damn boring, so.

Billy likes cleaning the communal kitchen after working out and before showering. He always enjoyed cleaning and cooking, but his newfound kitchen woes at home have left him feeling envious of a kitchen where everything *works*. Where nothing is conspiring against him to make his day worse.

It makes Billy *feel* better, like he's actually accomplishing something. Which is saying a lot, because he has a whole house to refinish, refurbish, repair -- whatever goddamn word, he's gotta make it happen. He *could* be trying to paint one of the rooms in his house -- but the thought is so daunting that it kind of makes him feel sick.

Which makes him feel idiotic, which in turn makes him feel tired -- and *then*, he ends up not doing anything at all. Even on his days off, when he has all the time in the goddamn world.

He just ends up paralyzed by the need to do so many things.

Instead, Billy always finds himself sprawled useless on his mattress in the one goddamn finished room in the entire house.

And by god, it's the ugliest fucking room Billy's ever seen, which somehow makes the whole thing *even worse*.

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"No," Billy says, opening the door to Max's smiling face.

She's standing on the front porch, tupperware in hand, with a girl next to her who Billy doesn't really know. All he remembers is that she's the Chief's daughter, so he knows to watch his mouth around her -- which is why Billy just says *no* and not *fuck no*.

He's considerate like that.

"Common, Billy. You bought this place months ago and I *still* haven't been inside."

Billy squints. "Are those cookies? Are you trying to bribe your way into my house with baked goods?"

"No," Max says.

"Yes," her friend says, face full of utmost sincerity. Max elbows her. Billy thinks her name is Jane. He likes Jane, he decides.

"Max, there's nothing to see. It's a shithole. It's why it was so cheap."

It's honestly a miracle the porch hasn't collapsed under the weight of two teenage girls. Billy always holds his breath when he walks across it, unsure if it'll bear his own weight every goddamn time.

"I still wanna see," Max says.

Billy holds his hands out for the cookies, deciding that *maybe* he'll consider letting her into the foyer, and then the living room (his current everything-room) if the cookies are good enough. But that's it -- nothing else.

"I'll consider it. Pay up, though." Max reluctantly hands over the tupperware and Billy pops a cookie into his mouth. Oh. They're something with *caramel* -- that conniving little schemer. Billy's a sucker for caramel. "Where are all your little friends?" Billy asks, through crumbs.

"They didn't want to come," Max says with a shrug. She's trying to

keep the smile off her lips, knowing that she's won when Billy sticks another cookie into his mouth.

"Aren't they, like, all for adventures? And being in places people don't want them to be?" Billy can't think of a better place for them to want to be other than the last place Billy wants them.

"Haunted," Jane says, her eyes hovering somewhere above Billy's head. He's leaning on the doorframe, blocking the doorway, but behind him at the back of the foyer, he knows that they can see the staircase leading up to the second floor of the house.

Billy grits his teeth, chews, and swallows. "What?"

"They think the house is haunted," Jane says, like Billy's dumb, like she didn't make that clear the first time.

"It's stupid," Max says. "*They're* stupid."

Billy thinks of doors that stick closed, of fuses that blow at their own discretion. He thinks of Jane's eyes looking at something behind his head. His stomach twists.

"That's dumb," he says, and sounds more sincere than he feels.

Max rolls her eyes and says "obviously." Jane just makes a face Billy doesn't particularly like -- like she's considering if *dumb* is really the word she'd use. He doesn't want to know what other word she'd use, unless it's a very close synonym. Anything else? Totally not acceptable.

"Fine," he says, halfway through another cookie. "You can see *one* room. But that's it. The rest of the place isn't safe."

"Why not?" Jane asks, stepping into the house after Max.

Billy lets them stand in the foyer for about two seconds before he herds them, like sheep, into the large living room to the side.

"Because this place was sitting empty for years," Billy says as he ushers the teens. "You can't just let houses sit like that -- you've gotta take care of them. This place was built in 1800's. There's upkeep and

shit that wasn't done, so now it's falling apart."

It doesn't help that the people who bought the place before Billy had set out to remodel the whole place, tearing pretty much *everything* out of it in the late sixties before they called it quits halfway through. So, there are many rooms that are completely bare, devoid of floors and chunks of the walls from where they tried to modernize, everything left in a state of half-repair. There are a couple rooms that they finished -- which are horrible, Billy thinks, because everything in the sixties was just god-awful -- and there are a couple, including the kitchen and the master bedroom, that seem pretty original.

"Oh," Jane says.

She and Max stop in the middle of the living room, which is currently doubling as Billy's bedroom and dining room. The mattress is tucked into the corner and piled full of blankets, unmade and messy, looking the picture of the bachelor lifestyle Billy is currently living. There's a cheap card table with an even cheaper plastic chair he's been using as a place to eat. Everything else is just in boxes or in one well-loved set of drawers.

"Why would anyone paint their walls that color?" Max asks with a frown, eyes narrowed as she looks at the ruddy orange of the walls. Billy isn't sure it's worse than the black-and-white-striped accent wall at the far end of the room, though, which gives him a migraine every time he looks at it.

Billy shrugs. "People were on weird drugs in the sixties," Billy says, feeling it's pretty close to the truth.

There were orange curtains, too -- but Billy had ripped those out and thrown them away right after he signed the contract.

Max and Jane wander around the living room for as long as one room can keep them entertained. There's not even much to snoop around in, since Billy's living pretty bare bones here. He's got some more stuff in boxes in another room -- but it's not like he really had all that much shit to begin with. Soon, the girls start drifting near the two doors that lead into the kitchen and what he assumes was supposed to be -- a library? A parlor? He's pretty sure he's turned what was

originally the dining room into the living room already, so it's not like it fucking matters anymore.

Billy realizes he can't really keep them from their curiosity, so he decides on the lesser of two evils: the kitchen.

The library barely even has walls, so. He closes that door before they can snoop too much and herds them into the kitchen with little more than a scowl and a lazy gesture.

"Oh!" Max says, looking around the kitchen. "It's nice!"

Clearly, the kitchen had been redone at *some* point in the last hundred-and-fifty years, but it wasn't redone by the last owners. It definitely needs an update, but it's kind of *nice*, Billy thinks, looking at the meticulously handcrafted white cabinets and the farmhouse sink. It's simple, but lovingly put-together by someone who clearly spent a lot of time in the kitchen. The whole room's got a kind of particular charm, and the design looks *fitting* in this old-ass house. Like it belongs. Not like the garishly orange living room. Or the bathrooms, which are fucking *hideous*. Why a toilet has to be baby blue, Billy's got no idea -- he just knows he's got to replace it with something normal.

"Yeah," Billy agrees, leaning against the wall as they meander around, peeking inside all the cabinets and drawers like the snoops they are. "It's alright."

As much trouble as Billy has in the kitchen with the wiring and everything, he's kind of partial to the space. It's definitely better than the pumpkin monstrosity that he sleeps in.

"I like it," Jane says.

Billy watches as she pulls her fingers gently over the cabinets. He's keeping those, he thinks -- someone went to the trouble of making them perfect for the house. It'd be a waste of money to try and find something more modern when they work just fine. Maybe he could give them a fresh coat of white paint, though.

Jesus -- there's so much work to do that the thought of it is physically

overwhelming, like an unmovable, unshakable weight settling over his shoulders. Just heavy enough to make breathing a little hard.

He also can't help but think it's a goddamn miracle nothing *weird* has happened since they came in. Then again, it's all probably in Billy's head, anyway. Which is *just great*.

"Okay," Billy says, finally setting the tupperware of cookies down on the counter. "Tour: over."

Max whines. Probably because she knows just how much it pisses Billy off. Like that's going to get her anywhere.

"But we only saw two rooms! This place is *huge*."

"Two rooms is all you get. Best and worst, alright? Once I work on more, you can come see them, alright?" Not that Billy really *wants* Max all up in his space, but it's not like she's going to listen when he tells her she's not welcome.

Max pouts, arms crossed. "But I can help! *We* can help."

Next to her, Jane nods.

Billy clenches his jaw: absolutely *done*.

"Jesus, I heard you the first time, okay?" Billy can't even count how many times she's offered to help him fix up this dump. Why can't she just want normal teenage girl shit? "Now you've overstayed your welcome, so get out."

He leads them down the other entrance to the kitchen, down the long narrow hallway back into the foyer. Somehow, he manages to get them all the way through the door without actually having to touch either of them. It's a testament to just how angry and unapproachable Billy can look, which he's endlessly thankful for. It makes herding teenagers nearly effortless.

"Please let us help?" Max says again. Like she knows Billy is never planning on taking her up on it.

Good, let her suffer.

“Thanks for the cookies,” Billy says with all of his teeth -- and closes the door in their faces.

Author's Note:

the amount of unnecessary research that is going into this is absolutely *dumb*.

comments are always cherished.

you can find me on [tumblr](#), if you are so inclined.